

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Robert Alexander Anderson, 92, composer and retired sales executive

"It was a big house. . . with six bedrooms on the second floor. Downstairs, a great big living room, tremendous big room, and a large dining room, pantry, and a big kitchen. . . . It was only 21,000 square feet, about half an acre. Not too big, but right on the water, right on the beach. Good, choice piece of property."

R. "Alex" Anderson, Caucasian, was born June 6, 1894 and raised in the family home on the corner of Beretania and Ke'eaumoku Streets in Honolulu. His father, Robert Willis Anderson, was a dentist originally from New Jersey. His mother, Susan Alice Young, was a daughter of Honolulu entrepreneur Alexander Young.

Although Anderson was not raised in Waikīkī, he spent a great deal of his boyhood near his grandfather's home, located on the beach next to what is today the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. After Alexander Young and his wife died, the home was owned and occupied by Anderson's aunt, Bertha Young.

Anderson attended Punahou (Class of '12) and Cornell University, receiving his degree in 1916 in mechanical engineering. His extraordinary experiences as an escapee from a P.O.W. camp in Europe during World War I have been documented in newspaper and magazine accounts.

Following the war, Anderson worked in Chicago for Westinghouse, then, in 1923, returned to Honolulu and was employed by Von-Hamm Young. He retired in 1963.

Anderson is best known as one of Hawai'i's most prolific composers of hapa-Haole songs, such as "Lovely Hula Hands," "Haole Hula," and "Mele Kalikimaka."

He and his wife, the former Margaret Center, live in Diamond Head.

Readers are encouraged to consult other biographical accounts of Anderson's life.

Tape No. 3-5-1-85

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert Alexander Anderson (RA)

March 4, 1985

Diamond Head, O'ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and 'Iwalani Hodges (IH)

IH: This is an interview with Robert Alex Anderson at his Diamond Head Home on March 4, 1985. Interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and 'Iwalani Hodges.

WN: Okay, Mr. Anderson, can we start by having you tell us where you were born and when you were born?

RA: I was born in Honolulu very close to Ke'eaumoku Street on Beretania. The house I was born in was not the one that we lived in later but was within a block on Beretania Street a little toward town from Ke'eaumoku. Perhaps two blocks from Ke'eaumoku on Beretania. And this was on June 6, 1894, which was before annexation, as you know, and after the Queen had been deposed. It was in that interim period. So I guess I belonged to the provisional government that was going on at that time. Then, where do we go from there now?

I told you I was born down the street a little bit, but the home that I remember growing up in was right on the corner of Beretania and Ke'eaumoku Street and ran up to Kīna'u Street. It was a nice block-long piece of property. It had quite a lot of yard space where we kids played ball and had a good time. Enough room for that. The house was a two-story, four-bedroom house. In those days, you didn't have so many bathrooms. There were two bathrooms, one for each pair of bedrooms. My mother and father occupied two bedrooms on the first floor, and my sister and I on the second floor in the two-story house. It was a nice, generous-size house, a wide porch all around two sides--the front and one side--and had, let me see, what we called the parlour in those days and a sitting room. And then, where my mother kept ferns, conservatory, and an inner lanai space. And then there was a dining room, pantry and kitchen with a little porch out on the back where the refrigerator was. In those days, of course, it was an icebox, and the iceman put the ice in every day.

We had an empty lot next to us which went with our property, just

the size, again, of what the house was on. And there, we raised chickens and had a cow. So, we could have all the milk we could use. We used to set that milk at night and have rich cream in the morning. I remember cream on cereal. In those days, we didn't think about cholesterol and (chuckles) all the butter difficulties. We had a nice, oh, probably two dozen chickens. Gave us all the eggs we needed. And then, as I was growing up, maybe when I was twelve or so, I became interested in pigeons, and I made a pigeon house, put it up in one of the windows up in the garage. It was called the carriage house in those days because we had horses. There were no automobiles yet.

We had a pair of horses and we had what's called a phaeton, which is a two-seated carriage, and a buggy, which was a one-seated carriage. When my mother would go Downtown to pick up my father, she'd have the man hitch a horse to the buggy, just the two of them going. On Sundays, they'd connect up to the surrey, and my sister and I would occupy the back seat, and Father and Mother the front seat, and go out for a drive. I remember going out sometimes to Kapi'olani Park, as far as that. And the whole idea was just an outing, you know, just to see what was going on and have a pleasant outing. And I remember, Sundays, doing that. And occasionally stopping in at someone's home for a little visit on the way. One of those visits was Downtown where Dr. McGrew had a home on the block which is now called Bishop Square and where the Young Hotel stood for many years. That was a nice home with palm trees and lots of foliage, tropical foliage. Hard to imagine now because it was right in the center of what is now the city, but I remember going in there when I was pretty young and Father and Mother visiting. Just an afternoon chat and we're on our way again. Another house we visited was my mother's father and mother, the Alexander Youngs. In those days, their home was just the Waikiki side of Thomas Square on King Street. The corner of King and--what is that going up the. . . .

WN: Ward?

RA: No, the next street up from Ward, Victoria. The King and Victoria corner was right across from Thomas Square. And they had a lovely old--you know, we call them ranch-type house. Rambling porches around and a lovely garden. They had what we used to call a monkey puzzle tree. (Chuckles) Kind of an evergreen tree with lot of branches coming out very close together. We kids would climb up inside that tree. The branches were close so that you could get ahold of them.

WN: Who named it the monkey puzzle tree?

RA: Monkey puzzle, I don't know where that name came from. I don't know whether that's an official name, or (chuckles) whether you find it in the dictionary or not. The idea was it was so many branches, it would be confusing even to a monkey. (Chuckles) Let's see, now. Where were we? We were driving in the carriage. Places we used to visit. Right across the street where now McKinley High School and

the THC Complex is located was the Ward Estate. Two sisters, Lucy and I forget the other one's name, lived there. And I remember driving in there with my parents just to call on them, say hello, and talk a little bit. Those are the little incidents I remember about our going out with the horse and carriage.

Now, going back again to our life in those days, we had three servants. We had a yardman, and a housemaid, and a cook. Chinese cook, and a Japanese man and his wife. And servants didn't cost you much. Seven or eight dollars a week (each). Of course, it's all relative. In those days you didn't have much income, either. (Chuckles) So, we lived very comfortably with our milk and our eggs all provided.

I remember going shopping with my mother. She used to go all the way Downtown to (Metropolitan) Market, which was on King Street between Fort and Bethel. That was a meat market, quite a big one. My mother and a lot of her friends used to do their shopping there. And also on Fort Street, just around the corner, were grocery stores. C.J. Day and Company and, let me see, Henry May were two different grocery stores she would deal with. Right on the corner of King and Fort, Waikiki side, was McInerny Shoe Store, and down Merchant and Fort was McInerny's Clothing Store. Across the ma kai Waikiki corner of Fort and King was E.O. Hall and Son, which was a sporting goods store and some hardware, stuff of that kind. Across the street from them was Benson Smith's Drugstore, and a little further down the street, Diamond and Company, which was chinaware and household things of that kind. These were all places that my mother would trade at. I'd be tagging along at that young age. Surprising I remember so much. I was probably around (six to eight). Well, let me see, when did I start school? Well, I was in school from six, first grade.

And going to that subject, I entered Punahou in 1900 at the age of six. The first and second grades at that time were down on Beretania Street just Waikiki side of the church, St. Andrew's Cathedral. There was a little cottage in there where they held school, first and second grades. They hadn't yet constructed Charles R. Bishop Hall at Punahou.

WN: Was it called Punahou then?

RA: It was Punahou. It was the Punahou first and second, and then the rest of the grades were out in the campus where it is now. And I think that only lasted a couple of years, and then they got the whole school moved to one place. But I remember my first day at school, I think it must have been, because I still remember the arithmetic lesson. It was adding up two apples and three apples. Nice little picture of apples on the board. I think the teachers did that. Put two here and put three there, now how many would you (chuckles) have? Five. I knew that. I was counting that much. After the second grade, as I say, we were out at Charles R. Bishop Hall at Punahou. I went through the eighth grade in that building.

And I remember several of the teachers I had, but I don't think we'll go into that here, except, perhaps, the influence of a teacher in the fourth grade, Mrs. Turner. She taught us quite a bit about astronomy, the constellations. She'd draw pictures of the constellations on the board and would talk on scientific subjects which immediately interested me. I seem to have that little turn of mind to enjoy scientific things all the way through. I mean, I liked the chemistry classes and the physics classes, and that sort of thing. Also, I guess it was the seventh grade, where we got a beginning of Latin. Latin in the seventh and eighth. And I developed a liking for languages. So, when I got over into the upper school, I took (two) years of French and four years of German, and two of Latin. So I just had a fondness for languages and derivation of (words). How much of our English comes from the Latin and from other languages.

I was very keen about mathematics, also, and took all the math that was offered. And on top of that, I took college freshman math in a special class. Three or four of us were inclined that way. Our math teacher made a special deal where before school started, we came early in the morning to his quarters in one of the dormitories up on the hill. And in his quarters we would go into first year of college math, a little touch of calculus and so forth. And that was my bent as I went on through to college. Studying engineering, you take all the math you can get. That and the languages. And also, I was a good English student. I remember analyzing sentences and finding the adjectives and the adverbs, and the subjects and the predicates, and all that. That came easily to me. My grades were always in the nineties, usually ninety-five or better. It just didn't seem hard. (Chuckles) I just had a knack for it.

When I came to go to Cornell, they accepted me without an exam, no entrance exams, just on my record. Nowadays, I guess, it's harder. There are so many applicants today and they take so few. Something like four or five thousand out of 20,000 freshman class get admitted nowadays. So, that was schooling. Oh, I was interested in dramatics and in music. I sang in the choir or whatever it was, and I was president of the dramatic club. We put on, I remember, Shakespeare's "As You Like It." It was put on out under one of the big (monkey pod) trees right there on the campus. I became editor of the Oahuan Magazine in my senior year. Now, I think it's just a yearbook. At that time, it was a monthly. We had contributions, you know, little stories and verse. And I was inclined to write little short poems and things of that kind. That's what later led to my lyric writing and songs.

IH: Did you do any songwriting in high school?

RA: In high school, I wrote a class song for the graduating class. That was my first effort (chuckles) at composing. And I never studied composition. I mean, formally. I studied by picking up everything I could find and observing how other people did it. What's the different---the harmonies, for instance, harmonic changes.

I worked them out as I went along without any textbooks or anything of that kind. Just by experience, by doing it myself. I became interested first in the ukulele and took one or two lessons and then amused myself with it. And then, in my senior year, one of my classmates, Eddie Hutchinson, played steel guitar very well. And I admired it and I said, "I'd like to learn that." I had a straight guitar.

And he said, "I'll teach you." So we just used the ordinary guitar and got a steel and picks on the hands, you know. So he taught me one or two songs just before I went to college. And later in college, I featured the steel guitar in our concerts and played little solo numbers of the old-time Hawaiian music like the "Kalima Waltz" and the old monarchy music. Simple things, very easy to play.

I heard that Cornell had a mandolin club. You never hear of it today, but in those days they used the mandolin. So I bought one couple of months before I was to go and taught myself to play it enough so that when I got there I tried out for the mandolin club and was accepted, put in the second mandolin division. I wasn't too good at it, but (chuckles) good enough to play chords and simple second parts. So, I was part of the musical club there. Let me see, we should go back to Punahou and finish up there.

WN: How did you get from your house to Punahou?

RA: Walked. Let me see. There was a big open square. Makiki playground, was right diagonally back of us, and you took the diagonal across that over to Makiki Street, and up Makiki to Wilder, and over Wilder into Punahou. It probably took twenty minutes or so, half an hour maybe, to walk. Well, in those days, your parents didn't drive you around like they do now. They didn't have automobiles to do it, and they weren't about to hitch up horses. But my wife (she was Peggy Center) lived on Green Street and had a horse. She and a pal who also had a horse, Beatrice Beckley, used to ride their horses to Punahou and tie them up under a tree during the day and ride home in the afternoon. But I did it on my own feet (chuckles).

WN: You mentioned that you had some cows and chickens and so forth . . .

RA: One cow.

WN: Did other families in that area have that, too?

RA: There were no restrictions in those days. In fact, right across, back of our property, were open rice fields. Chinese were growing rice in that area. And they had a goat, which I got very intrigued about. We used to go over and pet the goat. That was in the back of us up ma uka of Kīna'u Street. On the Waikīkī side of Ke'eaumoku Street there was a Chinese vegetable garden, and there was a little 'auwai, stream, coming through it. This is before they corrected the flood conditions in Makiki. Whenever we had heavy rains, we had a few feet of water coming through our place down in Ke'eaumoku Street. But it

was pretty primitive in those days.

I had another activity in my home. Let me see, about the seventh grade, I think, seventh, eighth grade, I became interested in what was then called wireless. I read about Marconi. I think we had a lesson in school about Marconi inventing the wireless. A classmate of mine had made himself a receiving set for dots and dashes. He knew some of the operators down in the naval station which was (near) his place. His home was way down where the naval station was where the immigration station is today, I think. In that general area. And I used to go down to his house and see what he was doing and became interested and decided I would make a ham set. And in those days, it consisted of a spark coil, which was an induction coil. You put 110 (volts) in the primary and you got about 10,000, I guess, in the secondary, and you got a spark between two points. And that, connected to an antenna and ground, gave you a signal going out through the atmosphere. About six of us developed ham sets like that all over town. In the evening we'd flash to each other Morse code, dots and dashes.

Well, they heard about it at school. See, it was quite formal graduating from the eighth grade (chuckles) to go to the ninth grade. They always had quite a ceremony, show of some kind, talks. And they asked Sinclair, who is this guy I'm talking about, and myself to put on a demonstration of wireless on the stage. So we rigged up two little stations on either end of the stage with small antennas, and then the spark gap where you get the flash back and forth, and all connected with batteries to operate. We gave a talk. He gave half and I gave half about Marconi and the development of wireless, and told about the equipment that we built and how it works. Then demonstrated by he (doing) a lot of dots and dashes and I (replying), and that sort of thing. It was quite a stunt for those days.

I followed up. I always had an interest in it and followed into radio and built sets, superheterodyne receivers. Even when I was in Chicago (1919 to 1923), radio was still pretty new. Station KDKA had come (on) out in Pittsburgh. It was one of the big ones. And we in Chicago, I built this big set with (a) lot of vacuum tubes, with earphones. I would listen to KDKA putting on musical programs and all kinds of programs. So I kept that interest all the way through and developed it a little bit.

In school, as a kid in the grades, I and some of the neighborhood kids were inclined toward athletics. We formed what we called the BAC, Boys' Athletic Club, with a meeting room up in the loft of our barn. We got our mothers to make us uniforms. (Chuckles) Baseball, you see. We all had gloves, and balls, and bats. And the backyard of our place was big enough for, you know, we used to call (it) "numbers." Just to run to first base and back again. If you had a long enough hit, you'd go one trip; otherwise you stay on first till somebody knocks you home. That sort of thing. Then, in Punahou, I followed up in athletics in all three sports: baseball, football, and track. I got my letter in each sport. In those days, the

competition was not so great with weight. In football, I mean, I was 145 pounds. Played quarterback and fullback part of the time. But it was pretty simple football as compared to today's.

WN: What are the schools that you'd compete with?

RA: McKinley, Kamehameha, St. Louis, same schools as today. And we all had teams about on a comparable basis, you see. I remember the first forward passing, what was a shovel pass, underhand, just short over the line, you know, to connect with the guy over there. We didn't learn to throw the ball until a couple of years later they were doing it after my graduation. I think Scotty Schuman was perhaps the first to use the overhand throw, a forward pass.

WN: So, it was mostly running plays, then?

RA: Yeah.

WN: What type of formations did you have?

RA: Oh, be off tackle, end run, and straight buck through the center of the (chuckles) line. And these little passes. Pretty much like today's game but in a cruder sort of way, not so perfected as it is today. We didn't put in as much practice time as they do nowadays. We didn't have any spring warm-up season or anything like that. Just come out and play. (Chuckles)

WN: Where were the games played?

RA: Alexander Field and at Kam and McKinley. All the different schools had playing fields. We didn't have 'Iolani in those days. That came later. We had St. Louis. St. Louis, McKinley, Kam, Punahou. I think that was it. So, what have I left out, if anything?

WN: Can you tell me something about your father?

RA: (Yes). My father was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1857. He went through the public schools of New Jersey and then to the Philadelphia Dental College in Philadelphia. He became a dentist, got his degree, DDS, dental surgeon, and started a practice. But he was rather slight and inclined to be a little sickly, and his lungs were threatened with TB. The doctor told him, "You might develop TB if you're not careful." He advised him to go to the West Coast and get out in a drier atmosphere, climate. He went to California and practiced there for a little while, two or three years. And I never did hear why he came to Hawai'i, but I think it was just on a trip with some friends. Came over and found out there were only a couple of dentists here at that time. This was in the 1880s. I must look up the exact year that he came. It would be about 1885. And he started practicing in an office down on Hotel and Alakea Street, which later became the YMCA, the first Downtown YMCA. He developed quite a nice practice. He was a good dentist, first-class, and he had patients on all the islands. Once or twice a year, he'd get on

an inter-island steamer, go to the different islands to take care of the ones that needed attention. And then, of course, he had his office in Honolulu, Downtown.

I can thank him for the fact that I don't have any teeth to take out now. I have some bridgework, but it's all anchored (chuckles) in place. Because I have enough of my teeth remaining to hold it. And that came from his insisting on dental hygiene. Really brushing our teeth, my sister and myself. Her teeth are still good today. She's eighty-nine. And also, he taught us to chew our food. And there was an article where they talked about fletcherizing. A man named Fletcher said you should chew every mouthful twenty times before swallowing (chuckles) it. So I don't know whether I chew twenty times, but I got the habit of chewing thoroughly. And that exercised the gums. A lot of people who get to my age, have trouble with the gums. The teeth fall out, all that. They get pyorrhea. I've never had any gum trouble. My teeth are just as solid today as they ever were. So, starting at that time and all my life, I've done heavy chewing. (Laughs) I get a tough steak, I chew it till it's ready to swallow. (Laughs) And I give him credit for putting me on the right track. Because a lot of kids just swallow their food whole. (Chuckles) You know, swill it down with a drink. So that was a good thing for me.

Oh, I almost died when I was ten years old. I had an appendix flare up. And Dr. George Herbert operated on me. Those days, it was pretty crude compared to what it is today. They used chloroform instead of ether. It had a sickly sweet smell which I still remember. And their sanitation methods were not anything like they are today. No penicillin and no. . . . Oh, I think they used alcohol probably to sterilize their instruments. So, as a result of that, one week after the operation--he took out the appendix, that part was all right--an abscess developed. Peritonitis set in. And I almost died with that. I came through very high temperature and all that sort of thing. And then, as I remembered, it was weeks before I. . . . I was in a wheelchair. And this area had a tube. It was draining. See, the abscess had formed in there, and they just kept on draining out for all that time till it finally healed up of its own accord. But that was at the age of ten. Now, strangely enough, my brother who came five years later. . . . First, my sister was a year and a half younger than I. She was born in Honolulu also, and today is living in Pebble Beach. I can tell you a little more about her later. And then, five years younger than I was my brother Willis. He, at the same age, at the age of ten, had an attack of the appendix, which abscessed and he lost his life. They couldn't save him. So, at ten years old, he died.

WN: What hospital did you have your operation at?

RA: It was just in somebody's home. (Laughs) On Kewalo Street, Miss Johnson's--she called it a sanatorium or something like that, but it was just a frame house with a half a dozen rooms in it. That was what they had. I guess the Queen's Hospital was in existence, it

must have been, but this Dr. Herbert, who was the family doctor, had a connection there and simply sent me there. I guess the methods they used weren't too sanitary. But I managed to come through it. Let me see. Subsequently, I've had a lot of operations, but (chuckles) under more sanitary conditions. Where did we leave off now? Where do we want to . . .

WN: How about your mother? Something about your mother.

RA: Well, to go back to her parents, her father was from Scotland, a little town between Glasgow and Edinburgh, about half way; and her mother was from Perth, England. They married. My grandfather was an engineer and a builder, and he was employed by a firm of contractors, mechanical contractors, and sent out to erect a sawmill in Port Alberni, Canada, which is on Vancouver Island. Let me see, this would be about. . . . I have to look up the date. He was a young man at that time, about thirty. He was born in 1833. This would be about (1858), '59 or '60, that he was sent out to Canada to erect a sawmill and took his bride with him. And they were there four years on that island. And a couple of children arrived during that time. Pretty primitive conditions. There were Indians around. He wrote his story, which is very interesting.

And after he (finished his job there), they stopped briefly in Oakland, California, visited somebody there, and then got on a sailing ship intending to go to Australia. See, they were British subjects, and the ship put in at Hilo for water and supplies, and so forth. And I never had the official statement, but I suspect my grandmother had enough of the ocean by that time, and so she said, "Let's get off." (Chuckles) So, the grandparents got off in Hilo and set up shop. He set up a little machine shop, take odd jobs, and so forth. And this was in 1865 by this time. Then, two years later, 1867, my mother was born there in Hilo. And grandfather, meantime, he was quite inventive and he got into the sugar industry and began improving the sugar mill machinery. He found ways of getting more sugar out of the cane and developed quite a few pieces of machinery. They were patented and he was able to reap the benefits of that. And gradually, he obtained an interest in two of the plantations on the Big Island, Pepe'ekeo and Waiākea. He had half-interests in those plantations. Payment for what he'd been doing, you see. About three or four years in Hilo, and then he moved to Honolulu became head of the Honolulu Iron Works. And he was head of that for about thirty years, president of it, and during that time, continued to invent machinery for sugar.

And also, he wrote some very nice poetry about the Islands. He was charmed by Hawai'i and wrote some nice things. And I guess I get some of my talent from him. That, and I get music talent from my father who played the organ very well. He used to play the organ in Central Union Church for special events, for weddings and things like that. We had a little small organ in our home at Ke'eaumoku and Beretania. He would, oh, very often, go to the organ after dinner and just improvise and play. And we had an upright piano

which my mother played. And my mother sang. She sang in the Central Union Choir for a while. So, I inherited music on both sides. And poetry from grandfather particularly, I think. Let me see, now. We're wandering here and there, and everywhere. But go back to the central theme.

WN: This is fine. Your grandfather had a home in Waikīkī?

RA: Yes.

WN: Can you describe that home for us?

RA: The first home that I knew when I was quite young was the one I told you about opposite Thomas Square on King and Victoria. Then, oh, when was it? Well, he bought the Moana Hotel. First, he began to get into the hotel business. He built the Alexander Young Hotel, Downtown, which was opened in 1903. He had made enough money in his inventions and his sugar connections in the Honolulu Iron Works so that he was quite a wealthy man for those days, and put quite a few millions into that Young Building, which was first-class construction in every way. Way ahead of his time. And after that, about three years later, he sort of had a flare and wanted to build the hotel and tourist business. And there was a little hotel called the Royal Hawaiian where the Armed Services Y is today. There are pictures of it around. It was a nice, white-frame building. I remember it as a kid going over there. He bought that about 1903 or '04, or '04 or '05. And I think it was 1907, the Moana Hotel had been built by other people in Waikīkī and was in financial distress, and he bought that and started to operate it. So, I came . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: He purchased the Moana Hotel in 1907.

RA: Let me see, that was about 1908, he bought that.

And in 1910, I remember, they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary, grandpa and grandma. I was fifteen at the time or sixteen. They had all their family come from the Mainland. I remember a big table set up, about thirty people. And I was one of the young ones there. A cousin of mine was one year older. He came from California. And we were expected to get up and make toasts. (Chuckles) I was pretty shaky on that at that time, but got away with something or other, I forget. Anyway, that takes care of the grandparents--well, he died shortly after that golden wedding in 1910. Later in that year, he died. This was when they were living in the Waikīkī house.

IH: When did they build that house?

RA: I would have to guess at that, but it was probably around 1905 or '06 or something along in there. They had only been in it for five or six years, I think, when he died. And I was a little kid when I first went out there, though, which would indicate around early 1900s. Well, perhaps 1903, thereabouts. It was a big house. I think I described it before, with six bedrooms on the second floor. Downstairs, a great big living room, tremendous big room, and a large dining room, pantry, and a big kitchen. Then off to the---from the entrance was what they called the billiard room. They had a billiard table. And this grandfather clock was in the hall at the entrance to the house. He died in 1910; my grandmother, about 1914, I think, '15. Miss Bertha Young, the unmarried daughter who had stayed with them, stayed on in that home. And she had a companion (named) Bess Young, they were not related. Bess Young was a nurse who had taken care of Mrs. Alexander Young in her later illness. And they stayed on and lived there until first one, then the other died. I don't remember the years. I'd have to look that up. But they lived there quite a while until after the Royal [Hawaiian Hotel] was built and until the Royal (people were) looking at her property and made her offers to buy it. They wanted to get that property directly next to them. But as long as she was alive, she wouldn't sell it. And it was after her death that--I was one of the executors of her estate, and we finally worked out a deal, sold it. It was only 21,000 square feet, about half an acre. Not too big, but right on the water, right on the beach. Good, choice piece of property. Where do you want to go from there?

WN: You told us at one time that, from your home at Ke'eaumoku and Beretania, you used to go over to your grandfather's house.

RA: This is when I was about, I think, around fifteen. I used to ride a bicycle a lot and I kept a surfboard in this bathhouse. They had a special little bathhouse right on the water's edge with a shower and two, three rooms in it to undress. And I kept my surfboard there. My sister had hers also. And I don't know how she got back and forth, (chuckles) but I used to be independent and go on my own on a bicycle, have a couple of hours surfing, and peddle back home again for dinner. I don't know how often I did that, but it stays in my mind as something that I did quite a lot of.

WN: How did you carry your surfboard while you were riding a bicycle?

RA: Oh, I didn't, I left . . .

WN: Oh, I see. You had the surfboard . . .

RA: I left the surfboard out there.

WN: What route did you take?

RA: Down Ke'eaumoku Street to King, King to Kalākaua, and all the way up Kalākaua, and then down Lewers to Kālia. And she was right at the end of Kālia Road. I guess those were the names in those days, same

names. The streets weren't always too good. Well, the main streets had what they called macadam, which was crushed rock, and I think just a little coral maybe to bind it. They weren't using asphalt in those days. That came a little later. I remember sometimes taking a bicycle ride around Diamond Head and going all the way out to where Wai'alae is today. That was a lot of farms out there and Isenberg Ranch. They had a big ranch, cattle and so forth. That's actually where Wai'alae (Country Club) is now. And all of that Kāhala district was just pig farms. So, it was pretty primitive as compared to today. It's hard to believe when you look back and see the changes that happened just in my lifetime.

WN: What was Waikīkī itself like? Like the area near your grandfather's home?

RA: Well, the Moana Hotel was there. That was the biggest thing. And it did not have the wings at that time. It was just the central building which was frame construction. Later on, the two wings were built of concrete. That was in 1918 that the wings were put on. The Halekulani Hotel, I don't remember the year, but that was just about along in there. And Niumalu [Hotel], little further down where the Hilton [Hawaiian Village Hotel] is today. That was about it. Coming out this way, there was the--I forget what year the Outrigger Club started. Well, they had what they called the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and cottages right next to Bertha Young where it is today. It was just a frame building and some little cottages scattered all through the grounds. And then, next to that was the Outrigger and then the Moana. The other side of the Moana was Judge Steiner's home, and then a place called Waikīkī Tavern. And about that time, you come to the seawall out there. Across the way were coconut palms and undeveloped property. And there was quite a bit of water up in there, the ponds. And when it ever rained hard, you'd get a run-off right pass the Outrigger Club, which was next to the Royal Hawaiian at that time, and mud would come down into the ocean. You'd get some dirty conditions in the water for a few days, until much later when they built the Ala Wai Canal to take care of that extra drainage. It dried it all up.

WN: Was there a stream or a river that flowed near your grandfather's home?

RA: Yes. There was grandfather's home, the Royal Hawaiian, the Outrigger, and then the little stream exited right next to the Outrigger. It wasn't always running. Sometimes it was dry, and then when there was rain, though, it would be running out. And sometimes it was pretty muddy. It would bring mud down, into the ocean. I started surfing in what they called cornucopia surf, small surf, only waves about so high, with a light board--a board about that thick.

WN: About an inch thick? About how thick it was?

RA: Oh, not more than an inch. And not too big, about the length of this bench.

WN: About five feet?

RA: Yeah. Something like that. It would hold a young kid up like I was at that time. So I learned on that. And then, later, when I was in school, Punahou, I had a heavy board about three inches thick, redwood, seven or eight feet long, weighed about seventy-five pounds.

(Laughter)

RA: You put that on your shoulder when you're going into the water and coming out again. Had to learn how to carry it. You couldn't maneuver it very well, you know. You'd get started on a certain slant on the wave and it would pretty much stay that way. You couldn't [do] like they do today, you know, they'd whip it around. But we didn't have the techniques. (Chuckles)

WN: Anybody teach you how to surf?

RA: No, I don't think of anyone in particular. I just went out, did what the others (chuckles) were doing. Then learned to paddle till I got a little strength and speed paddling. And then, went out on pretty small waves to begin with. Later I got into some of the big surf at Waikīkī. I remember what we used to call pearl dives. (Chuckles) The board gets started for the bottom, and you'd fly off, and you'd get churned up a bit, you know, in the bigger surf when it was big. So I remember a few times when I was down on the bottom. It seemed like a long time.

(Laughter)

RA: I wonder now why more kids don't get into trouble. They go out, no instruction. Nobody tells you to be careful or what to do, what not to do. (Chuckles) You learn by experience.

IH: How big was the big surf that you're talking about?

RA: The height of the surf? Six, seven feet, something like that. Most of the time, it was four or five feet. I guess we got waves as high as ten feet at times when it was coming in pretty strong. In very heavy weather, the waves would be kind of close together. You can see it nowadays. You get that kind of weather. And an awful lot of turmoil. The waves would break. And then, you got a lot of white water back of the waves. And that white water doesn't hold you up very (chuckles) well. It's full of air. You learn. I got scared a few times. You fight to come to the surface and there's nothing to grab onto. It was all that air in the water. And then, the solid water comes along just in time to get you up. Sometimes when it's bad, you get the next wave right on top of you. You've lost your board and you're floundering around there in one wave after another. Gradually, you work your way into shore, find your board. So, some interesting experiences.

IH: Did you ever do anything else on the beach? Hang around the beach

when you were down at . . .

RA: No, I don't remember much beaching. I wasn't one to lie on the beach. I used to be intrigued by some of the Hawaiian boys and musicians [who] would go out on the . . . There was a pier right outside the Moana Hotel. Went out a couple of hundred feet, maybe 300 feet into the water and a little covered house at the end of it. The beach boys would gather there and play music, and I would always be around, listening.

We had school dances in the Moana Hotel occasionally. Big commencement, graduation dances, and that sort of thing, in June every year.

WN: Did you do any singing? Did you join in at any time with them? Or did you have your own bunch or gang that went out to the beach?

RA: Not at that time. Let me see, I sang in whatever school groups there were, you know. I don't know whether we called it a choir or chorus or whatever. Just one of the group. I wasn't doing any solo or anything. I didn't do any solo until I got in college and found that people were interested in Hawaiian music and playing the guitar with the steel. And then, I'd sing one or two songs with ukulele accompaniment. It was a novelty to people at that time, 1912 to 1916. In fact, a lot of people didn't know where Hawai'i was (chuckles), back East. It took six days on the steamer and four days on the train to get to the East.

WN: What did you tell them when they asked you about Hawai'i?

RA: (Chuckles) Well, I tried to describe what it was like and that it was a part of the United States. That was what they didn't know. They thought it was foreign (chuckles), a lot of people. And I said, "We're an organized territory of the United States." So, you'd have to tell them about it.

WN: Did you have any name for the area that you surfed?

RA: Yes, they called. . . . Let's see. There was the little kids' place. What did they call that? The name that I remember particularly was Queen's Surf. Queen's Surf was over by where the seawall is, pretty close to where the park begins.

(Telephone rings.)

RA: I've forgotten what. . . . That sticks in my mind particularly. Queen's Surf. And that was fairly bigger than the rest. I wonder if anybody's answering that.

(Interview stops, then resumes.)

WN: Why don't you tell us something about your activities at Cornell?

RA: Oh, yeah. Well, I chose Cornell because it had a good reputation for engineering education and also competed in all sports, which I was interested in. Otherwise, I might have gone to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], which was just study-oriented at that time. There were no sporting events. So, Cornell filled the bill very well for me. It had a first-class engineering curriculum. I went into mechanical, the full mechanical four-year course, with a secondary in electrical engineering, two years of electrical, in which they did not give a degree. They gave what they called a certificate in electrical. My degree was ME, mechanical engineer. And my grades slipped from the nineties to the seventies (chuckles) at Cornell because I went into a great many outside activities. And I ended up with a seventy-six average, passing all the time. I never had any conditions or anything of that kind.

But I went out (chuckles), I tried out for football, and found out I was just a little shrimp (laughs) with all the big guys. I was in one or two scrimmages and pretty shift. I was a good open-field runner and I did pretty well at that, but I decided that these big guys were too punishing. I couldn't take it. I was 150 pounds (chuckles) and they were in the 200 area. So, just like it is today, you know, football is a big man's game. So I settled on track. I had been a hurdler at Punahou, low hurdles. So I went out for that and stayed with it all the way through. I was never a star, but I was on the team and competed in dual meets and got a point or two here and there. As I say, I wasn't really built to be a hurdler. My legs are not long enough (laughs) to--I'm surprised the coach didn't turn me into something else because I had to stretch to get those eight strides between hurdles. I was able to do it and develop to turn in a pretty good times but not winning times. However, I enjoyed the training. It was pretty much all-year training on each of the sports. In winter we trained on a board track. It was out in the snow and we wore long johns and a knitted cap down over the ears. And we'd go out and do our laps around the board track. We had an indoor--what do we call it, not a gym. . . . Anyway, big indoor, big enough for a baseball field, and we set up hurdles in there and did that kind of practice. And then, for our longer stuff, we went out in the open air, pretty cold. (Chuckles)

It got down below zero, as much as twenty below zero there. Ithaca is situated in upper New York State and it's not too far from Buffalo, and Buffalo's got a reputation of very severe winters. But I enjoyed that. I never experienced it, growing up here. I'd never seen snow till I got there. I remember on Thanksgiving Day, the first snow came down and I had a lot of fun in the snow, got on a pair of skis. And they didn't train or specialize so much on skis in those days. You just got on them like we used to go out and get on a surfboard and teach yourself to go down a hill. So, I never did learn to go cross-country on skis. But I wasn't very good. I was able to get on a hill and hold up pretty well because of surfboarding balance. So, I did a little of that. And then, we had a lake that froze over and there was skating on the lake. And I never was very good at skating because (chuckles) my ankles would give out. You know, you've got

to have strong ankles, but they'd begin to hurt. (Chuckles) I didn't go for that, but they had a toboggan slide on the edge of the lake. You'd climb upstairs, and get on a toboggan, and shoot down and onto the ice and out. And we had a lot of fun at that. A group of us, four or five, would get on a toboggan. And then there was a refreshment place you'd go into--it was well heated--and have hot chocolate, something like that, after being out in the cold. I remember those nights. So, that was my one sport at Cornell, was track. And staying with it, it did more for me than I could do for it, I guess. As I say, I was just an average hurdler. Able to stay on the team and compete. I knew a lot of fine guys that way and kept in touch with some of them.

Then, let's see. The musical clubs was my other activity aside from studying. Well, that was about it. I enjoyed my four years there. My vacations, I'd go Christmas vacation to an uncle in Port Chester, New York. And I also had a half brother in Plainfield, New Jersey. And I'd spend some time with each of them. They got to be very close. They were relatives to begin with and I used to enjoy them and they liked me. Summer vacations, I came home. Train, four days, and six days on the steamer again. But the steamer trips were always fun because there were always kids like myself coming back from schools at that time, and going over in September the same way. You'd have a school ship practically. And that was a lot of fun. On crossing the continent each time, I took a different route, so I got to know a lot about the United States. I'd take a northern route, and a middle route, and a southern route, and alternate.

IH: Did you do any composing at Cornell?

RA: Yes, I did. I didn't start to say I'm going to be a composer or anything like that. I had a feeling to write a song for our fraternity. I was a member of Pi Kappa Alpha, which is one of the big national fraternities which started in the Southern states. And I wrote this song which we used to sing in the fraternity. Then, let me see, when was it? I started a song which I called "Aloha Land," which was kind of a homesick song, thinking of the Islands from there. And when I got home later, I finished it and published it. I think that was my first printed song in about 1918, just a little after college. No, it must have been a little later than that. It's after my war experience. I really began to compose when we had come back here to live after that four years in Chicago. And the Junior League organization put on review type shows for benefits to raise money. And there (was) a man named Don Blanding who was quite a poet and also a good producer, theatrical producer.

(Telephone rings. Interview interrupted, then resumes.)

RA: So, he would write the words to most of the songs and I would write the music for them and put on these productions. And in one of those, in 1927, I wrote "Haole Hula." I wrote both the words and music for that and that was performed and danced for the first time in that show. And that has proved to be one of my most popular songs.

It's still played and sung today.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 13-41-2-85

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert Alexander Anderson (RA)

Diamond Head, O'ahu

April 4, 1985

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Robert Alex Anderson on April 4, 1985 at his home in Diamond Head, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Mr. Anderson, before we go on to the time after your graduation from Cornell, I want to back up just a little bit and ask you, when you used to go to your grandfather's house in Waikiki, besides surfing, do you remember doing anything else in that home or near that home, like parties or anything?

RA: Oh, yes, sure. We often went. The family had dinner gatherings. My family--my father and mother, sister and myself--would be there for Sunday noon dinner, for instance, occasionally. One big party was their golden wedding celebration which was in 1910. I think it was August, I don't remember the exact date. But most of their children were gathered here. Many of them had come from California. I remember I was sixteen, and a cousin was one year older. He'd come from California. Several other cousins were here. And there's a great big table in their very large living room. There must have been thirty people around it, especially constructed, you know, for the occasion.

Well, my family--mother and father, sister and I--would frequently drop in there on a Sunday afternoon to see the old folks and just visit a bit. So, we were part of the home, you might say, in and out, from time to time.

WN: Were there other things, like funerals, or anything like that?

RA: Well, my grandfather died. That was not long after this. I don't remember that date either. I think it was later that year. He had been suddenly stricken with a stroke. I remember my mother taking me into his bedroom as he lay there, after he had passed away before the funeral arrangements began. It's still vivid in my mind, seeing him, after he had passed away. That's the principal thing I remember.

WN: Okay. So, 1916, you graduated from Cornell University.

RA: June 16.

WN: What happened from that . . .

RA: I had been solicited by Westinghouse Corporation. Their representative had come to interview seniors, and I had accepted a job with Westinghouse Electric in East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to start in September. And I reported there for a--well, it was kind of an indoctrination period of working in their test floors where they would have constructed large generators, or large transformers, large electrical equipment, and run a test on them before they were shipped to the buyer. I was part of a crew that was making the test, reading thermometers, you know, reading r.p.m. [revolutions per minute], and so forth, keeping track of the performance of the unit. I remember going on night shift for that duty part of the time from 6:00 in the evening to 6:00 in the morning, twelve-hour period. And my pay was fifty-six dollars a month. (Chuckles) By today's standards, that's a couple of days' work. Anyway, it was very interesting and instructive.

And I was still engaged in that when war broke out in April of 1917. I became excited about it. Everybody was talking about it. A classmate of mine who had also come to Pittsburgh, we got together frequently. We said, "Let's enlist. We ought to be into this thing." And liked to get into aviation. Well, we went to the recruiting office and they said, "We have plenty of applications for air training. We'd like to accept your application for officer's training camp at Fort Niagara, New York." It was just about to start a session. So, I signed up on that. He didn't. I don't know what he did, finally, but I went up to Fort Niagara. It was still pretty cold, end of April, first of May, somewhere along there. There was ice in the Niagara River running nearby.

We got started in regular boot camp activities, long marches, drills, and so forth. And after two weeks there was a notice on the bulletin board that they would accept two volunteers from each company for aviation training, which is exactly what I wanted in the first place. I don't know how I could be so lucky on that, because (chuckles) otherwise, I'd have been a foot soldier all through the war. But I immediately applied and was accepted and sent back to Cornell where they had established a ground school course. If I remember right, I think that was a three-months' course. At least two months. I remember being through July and August into September.

At the end of that course, they picked the ten highest standing cadets--we were called cadets--and sent us directly overseas for air training. We'd never been in the air. They'd never tested us in the air at all. They gave us some physical tests on the ground, one of them putting you in a revolving chair and whirling you around several times, then telling you to point your finger at an object. The result of that is, if your finger drifts, you have difficulty pointing at the object. It (chuckles) goes this way or this way, depending on which way you've been whirled around. And you try to

fight it because you think you're abnormal, but actually, that's the normal. So, that's what they're looking for, to see if you get that reaction showing that you're, I guess, sensitive to changes in position, motion. So, physical exam. I almost got thrown out on physical exam because my feet were kind of flat.

(Laughter)

RA: I said, "I don't need big arches to go into the air force, do I?" And I said, "Furthermore, I've been very active on my feet as a kid. I've been tramping all through our mountains and I've run on the track team in school. So, I've never have had any trouble with my feet." So, (chuckles) he passed me. But imagine, maybe throwing you out because your feet didn't have a big enough arch, going into the air force. So, would you like me to continue on this narrative?

WN: Yes, mm hmm.

RA: Well, at the end of the ground school, we were assembled at Mineola, Long Island, waiting for a ship for a short time, and we were put aboard the Carmania, the White Star liner Carmania. And first, the ship sailed from New York to Halifax and put in there for a few days while a convoy gathered, a group of ships gathered, and then we set sail. I don't have the date in mind. It's approximately September sometime. And there were ten or twelve ships in this big convoy all heading across the Atlantic. It must have taken us seven or eight days, eight or nine, perhaps. We landed at Liverpool. However, we had been told we were going to be sent to Portugal for air training with the Portuguese air force. And all the way across on the ship, every morning, we had. . . . I don't mean Portugal, Italy. Italian training. And we had lessons in Italian language having to do with air terminology, planes, and so forth. And certain common phrases and so forth. The people who were giving us lessons were Fiorello La Guardia, who later was mayor of New York City; and Albert Spalding, who was a famous violinist. They were both helping us with Italian.

Arriving in Liverpool, we were notified that we were going to stay in England. The group that arrived a week ahead of us had been sent to Italy. So, the orders were changed, you see. Our group, there must have been 150 of us, something like that, maybe 200. We landed, and first thing they did with us was send us to Oxford University to go through the same ground school that we'd had at Cornell. Just a carbon copy because America had taken the course from the English, you see, and put it in. So, it was all familiar, but it was just a matter of killing time actually. They didn't have room for us at the training squadrons for they had to work things out to get spaces for us. So, at the end of that, they sent us to Grantham, England, which was a machine gun school. And for about a week or ten days we were lying on our stomachs shooting machine guns at targets and things like that, and taking them apart, and becoming familiar with machine guns.

I remember that during that period, Thanksgiving occurred. So, here we were, the end of November. I remember the celebration we had, a special dinner. They got turkeys for us, kind of tried to make it like home. The group got pretty hilarious. I don't know what we had to drink that (chuckles) keyed us up. I guess some of 'em smuggled some stuff in. Well, (chuckles) anyway, it got to be a pretty rough party. There was one little guy named Gaipa. (Chuckles) He couldn't have been more than five feet, two [inches]. They ended up throwing him from one (chuckles)--there were some big guys in the group, too--they'd toss him from one to the other.

WN: What is his name, again?

RA: G-A-I-P-A, Gaipa. Just occurs to me, now. Must have been a week or ten days of that regime. And then, they said, "We're ready to take you at various training squadrons." And I and a couple of other Americans were sent to Huntingdon, near St. Ives, in the middle of England. They had a primary training squadron there. And that's the first time I got sent up in the air was in what they called a DH-Six, De Havilland-Six. The De Havilland-Four was a famous fighter plane at that time, two-seater fighter. The Six was purely a trainer and was much slower. You could land at about forty miles an hour. And so, there were (some) crash landings, but very few people were hurt. They got out of it pretty well. Then, I had my first flight there, and several hours--four hours, actually--of dual training with an instructor. And then, after one flight with him, we landed on the ground. He says, "How do you feel? Like to take it up alone?" So, I made my first solo after four hours of instruction. I believe nowadays, they give 'em twelve or fifteen, twenty hours instruction before sending them up solo. Anyway, it went all right. I got up, and made a big circle around, and landed again.

And after, I don't remember the exact time, sounds like perhaps six weeks, eight weeks, we were sent to London Colney near St. Albans, perhaps twenty-five or thirty miles out of London, where they had an intermediate training squadron, a large airdrome and a lot of cadets there who were taking training on what they called the Avro, A-V-R-O two-seater, dual plane with a rotary engine. This was their equivalent of what the Americans called the Jenny. The Jenny had a stationary OX engine, whereas the Avro had a rotating engine. But they were about the same performance and used for dual training. After several hours on that, I was sent up solo in a Pup, a single-seater small plane that was very maneuverable. You could roll it, loop it, do all the gymnastics with it, and learned to do those things. Then, let's see, also during that period, I think I had a flight or two in a Spad plane, which is another single-seater fighter type plane.

Finally, after it must have been a couple of months of training--and by the way, sometimes that training was interrupted. Sometimes, you'd go several days without a flight because of the winter weather--fog. Largely, fog and rain. You don't get snow there around London, but you get that damp, foggy atmosphere. And so, for days at a time, we couldn't get up in the air. We just had to

wait for the weather to get better. So, that dragged the training out quite a bit, and it was May before I finally got to the advanced gunnery target practice and practiced fighting one against the other. We'd go up and have dual matches with camera gun. You shoot the other plane, get the picture in the camera. That was all good training. And this happened at Ayr, A-Y-R, in Scotland, and part of the time at Turnberry, Scotland, nearby. At Turnberry, they were using part of a golf course, famous golf course, for the landing. And we'd fly in the morning and play golf in the afternoon. This was a wonderful resort hotel that we were billeted in. Beautiful set-up. It's still that way today. It's still one of the famous resort places. My wife and I went back there to visit about 1953, I think it was, and it was still operating. We reminisced and went over the whole thing. Nearby, ten miles away was a little cemetery at Girvan, G-I-R-V-A-N, town. And at this final training station were quite a few accidents and we seemed to be going to a funeral once a week or something like that. Somebody would die. I saw one chap. . . . One of the things we did was dive on rafts out on the water and shoot at the raft. Dived at a steep angle, shoot, then pull out. Well, as he was diving and pulling out, the fabric from his wings disintegrated, and he had no leverage to come out, and crashed straight into the water. One of my friends that happened to. Planes were, you might say, a little bit (chuckles) rickety in those days. They wouldn't always hold together under stress. So, there were frequent accidents.

But I was lucky to get through without any trouble myself, and received my commission while there, first lieutenant. Aviation Section of the Signal Corps was the designation, which later became U.S.--what was it called? Air Service? For many years, the air was a part of the army until it became the air force on its own separate service. I don't know the dates on that. That's all part of the record. But at this time, we were called the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps.

Let's see, where do we go from there? Well, having finished that course, received my commission, my wings, I was sent across to France to a pilot pool. Quite a group of pilots waiting there to be assigned to fighter squadrons. As a squadron would lose personnel, they would draw on the pool for fresh replacements.

WN: Is this all just American troops, or is this all Allied?

RA: No, this was American and British. All the way through on this training and all, we were with the British, the Royal Air Force; first called Royal Flying Corps, later the Royal Air Force. I don't remember how long I was there, but this was late July, and along the first week in August, I think it was, I was notified and transported to Fortieth Squadron of the RFC, which was located at a little town called St. Pol, S-T P-O-L. They had their airdrome just outside the town. Of course, we had no macadamized runways. They had picked some smooth country, grassy section, where you could land and take off, where there're not too many buildings around. So, we made that

do for an airdrome.

There were four of us Americans attached to this Fortieth Squadron at the time that I went there. Eventually, they took us up. . . . They'd go up in flights of four planes to a flight. Let's see, three flights made the squadron. We would be called for certain times of the day. They started at dawn, soon as it was light enough to see to get off the ground. You still see the exhaust flames coming from the plane ahead of you. It's not quite light yet, you'd take off, and go over to the front. We were perhaps twenty miles back of the front, I guess, front lines, where the infantry was holding out--infantry and artillery. We would always cross over into the German side. The Germans never came over to our side. They were retiring and waiting for a chance to pounce on us if they could.

So, there were different types of planes. There was the artillery spotting plane, which was a two-seater and had a pilot and observer. And those planes would fly fairly low watching the burst of shells and reporting back where the hit occurred by radio. Incidentally, we all had that radio training in ground school as if we might be going on that duty, but I didn't go on that. I was assigned to a fighter plane. Incidentally, the plane we used at the front was called an SE-5 and had a Hispano-Suiza engine. If I remember rightly, I think it was 125, 130 horsepower, a V-8 piston type engine. The plane was equipped with two machine guns, a Vickers, English . . .

(Interview interrupted, then resumes.)

RA: Where did I leave off?

WN: You were talking about that V-8 engine.

RA: Yes. Oh, the machine guns that were mounted over the engines, the Vickers, and over the top of the plane was a Lewis gun, which had a drum, magazine, whereas the Vickers had a belt. The newcomers were taken up and gradually shown the ropes on patrol, coached by our leaders. However, we were handicapped by not having intercommunication between planes. Nowadays, your flight leader would talk to his planes in formation. All we had was a very light pistol firing a red light or a green light. I forget, now. One, I think it must have been a red light, was reporting engine trouble. And we had quite a bit of that. The engine would begin missing or something would happen, and you were told to drop out and go home if you had that kind of thing. And the other signal was what they called wagging the wings, which actually was tilting the plane back and forth to signal an attack. If your leader wagged his wings, you knew you were going down to attack.

I had been on duty almost a month, going to the line every day for a patrol and engaging occasionally in skirmishes with the enemy. Certain ones in the squadron got credit for knocking down planes. Another chap and I were responsible for downing a two-seater. A

German two-seater. Both of us made claim for it, but (chuckles) I guess they gave us half each, credit. That's as far as I got in credits because on the twenty-eighth of August, on one of these patrols, we started out four planes, but two had had engine trouble and dropped out, gone home, and it was my flight leader and myself who were left. We'd almost completed our two hours when we sighted five German Fokker planes below us. My leader wagged his wings and started down, I with him. And if he'd had voice communication, he would have said, "Now, I'm going to take a shot at those top planes and I'm going to pull out and go, and avoid them." Instead of that, the signal says attack, now. I assume that we're going down to mix it. We're two to five, but I assumed that's what he was ordering. So, I fixed my sights on a plane and went after it. He took one or two shots still up high, he pulled out, and went off and left me. Went home. I heard later that he said he didn't know what happened to Anderson. I don't think he reported the engagement. Didn't know where he had lost me. (Laughs) But I know very well what happened.

I got down among these five planes and was taking shots where I could; one coming headlong at me, and we were both firing away at each other. But with a large engine mass in front, the pilot's pretty much protected on that deal. I thought I was done for, so I decided to hold my course and take him with me, if he held his course. But at the last minute, he pulled off and avoided me.

WN: You were going to collide?

RA: We didn't collide. So then, the next thing, there's somebody on my tail, shooting, and I felt a sting around my knee. A bullet went through the tendon alongside the knee. With that, I half-rolled. You go over on your back and down in a dive. And that's the quickest evasion tactic. Time after time, you have to do that when somebody's directly after you. So I was so busy dodging these guys that I was constantly losing altitude, and finally, was just above the ground and just came out of a dive with room enough to come down and make a pancake landing on rough ground. My tail went up as if I was going all the way over, but then it settled back again and I was right side up. But I was right beside a German field artillery battery and before I could get out of the plane, I was surrounded by German soldiers. I had been hit in the knee, and a little splinter had gone under the skin in my back. I didn't know how bad that was, but it was hurting.

So, I got out of the plane and they immediately searched me and then put me with a German, I think it was a corporal. He took me across some country to a road, put me on a two-wheeled cart, instructed the driver to take me to a dressing station--a field dressing station--where they were taking care of German wounded. And they looked after me, dressed this wound, gave me a shot--tetanus, I guess, anti-tetanus. Then, after many hours of just lying there or sitting, waiting, I was put with German wounded in a railroad car, boxcar, straw on the floor, and we stretched out on the floor. The train

took us to Mons, Belgium. I guess we must have traveled ten or twenty miles or something from the front. And there, they had a prisoner-of-war hospital in Mons, where I was sent and looked after by English doctors. They had two English doctors and a couple of nurses. There must have been a hundred or more patients or wounded prisoners like myself, mostly English. In fact, I don't think there were any other Americans in that group.

Anyway, I was there three weeks while this healed and then was supposed to be taken into Germany to a permanent prison camp. To start off, we were marched for five or ten miles that day out of Brussels. And that night we were put into a temporary holding camp where there already were a lot of aviators, and a couple of Americans in the group, but mostly British. These were gathered in a [square] compound of buildings. The buildings formed a square with one gate entering into the inner compound, and the windows on the outside of all the buildings were sealed, so that was supposed to. . . . They only guarded the gate because you're not able to get out any of the windows. But two Americans who were there ahead of me had found some loose tiles in the roof.

(Interview interrupted, then resumes.)

RA: . . . discovered loose tiles in the roof above the room where they were confined, and said they were going to make an escape, and invited me and another American, who had just come in that day or the day before, to join them, along with a British corporal. Five of us to escape. And we did on a night, about 10 o'clock in the evening. We all climbed through the hole in the roof, and hung by the eaves, and dropped to the ground outside the compound.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

RA: We succeeded in escaping. We were outside of the compound when we dropped down. This was in a little village with a main street on one side of the camp and a parallel canal on the back side of the camp. We had a choice of either going along this street and perhaps being detected--we took a look and we were afraid to do it--or go to the canal. And (across) the canal was open country, fields. We chose to swim the canal, and to start off across open country, with no particular. . . . Well, we did have in mind to head (North) for Brussels because we were given the address of an underground man, Belgian, who helped prisoners to escape into Holland. So that would be our goal, then, first to get to Brussels. But the way we did it, we walked all that night in the general direction to the north, and we had to cross the same canal that we had crossed going. To get out, we had to cross to go back again. But the second time, we crossed on a bridge and we had to be very careful. Some of the bridges were guarded, had sentries on them. But we reconnoited and found one bridge that was free, and we went across and hid along this road until daylight occurred.

As it got daylight, we went into some woods. There were some fields

of growing vegetables or whatever, and in the middle of the fields was this little woody area, lot of trees and bushes. So before it got light, we got ourselves in the bushes and put a lot of foliage around us so that we could spend the day there. Soon as the farmers came out in the fields, one of our group went out and spoke to a farmer, told him we were there, and would they help us, give us something to eat. This was the Englishman who had been out on a previous escape and been captured again. He knew the ropes. He said these people will help us. All we have to do is ask for food. He could speak French fluently, so he went out and told them where we were, and pretty soon, they came with baskets of food and fed us; and that night, took us into one of the farmhouses nearby and fed us again, and gave us maps, and pointed out the main roads to go to get where we wanted to go. We often (walked), night after night. Walking at night, sleeping in the day in a farmhouse or in a barn or whatever. In each case, when daylight occurred, I would knock at the door.

Incidentally, after a few days, we split up into two groups. Three of us in one group, and two in another, because the five were attracting too much attention and too difficult for one farmer to feed five people. So, they went off, these other two guys. One spoke good French, one spoke good German. They thought they had the best chance to escape. In our group, I was the only linguist. I had Punahou French and German. And I became pretty good at that when (chuckles) I talked to these fellows. We'd go to a farmhouse door and knock early in the morning. The man would come to the door. I say, "Bonjour, monsieur. Nous sommes American aviateurs [Good day, sir. We are American aviators]." And go into my story: we're aviators, we've escaped, and will you please give us something to eat and a place to sleep for the day; we'd go on again tonight. And invariably, they would do that. They would take care of us, feed us, hide us, counsel us, tell us the best way to go, and so forth, to avoid Germans, where the concentrations were. And following that technique, we crossed Belgium. I think it took us about three weeks from the French border up to the Dutch border. The Dutch border way in the northeast corner of Belgium was supposed to be the easiest place to get through. It was least occupied. It was more just woods and open country in that area.

[See interview #13-60-4-85 for more information on this story.]

I think I'm going to have to stop because my voice is giving out. We'll continue. . . . I hate to keep bringing you back, but you're making me do this in great detail.

WN: I think it's really interesting.

RA: Maybe I'm doing it too minutely, but that's . . .

WN: No, I don't think so. I haven't heard a story like this before.

RA: I wrote the story when I first got home. I wrote it, and it appeared

in a Mainland magazine called McClure's. It ran seven months in monthly installments.

WN: I also understand your experiences . . .

RA: It's a full book-length story.

WN: . . . your experiences were also a basis of a movie, right?

RA: Yes. A movie was based on the title, The Dawn Patrol. That's what I called my story when it first came out. That's when I was shot down, on the dawn patrol, in the first installment of the book. I think I have the book right here.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 13-44-3-85

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert Alexander Anderson (RA)

April 9, 1985

Diamond Head, O'ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. R. Alex Anderson on April 9, 1985 at his home in Diamond Head, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay. So, when we left off, you were able to get to Holland and you were able to escape.

RA: We had made good our escape, had we? We had gotten through to Holland. I don't know whether I mentioned that in Holland, in Amsterdam, we went to our American consul, and he made arrangements to get us back to England by ship. We were two or three days in Amsterdam, and entertained by the consul. We had a very nice time and then were shipped back to London. The headquarters for our overseas group was located in London. So, I reported there. And they were amazed to see me. They thought that I had been killed and (was) missing in action. So, this was the first of November. And of course, the Armistice was a short way off and things were winding down. They did not assign me back to my unit but instead told me to go up to my training squadron in Scotland and lecture to the cadets up there about my experiences. How we had escaped and what they might expect under similar conditions.

So, while up there, Armistice was declared, and everybody, in wild jubilation, they took off in all the training planes in the squadron, half a dozen or more of them, and buzzed (chuckles) all over the English countryside about a hundred feet off the ground, just hedge hopping over the hedges and trees in celebration, you might say. I was in a plane with a South African captain. He was kind of a wild fella, and (chuckles) he was doing all kinds of stunts just above the ground. And I thought to myself, "Well, I've just had a wonderful experience, great luck in escaping. Now I wonder if we're going to crack up (laughs) during this celebration." But we didn't.

I reported back to London again and very shortly was sent back on one of the first ships back to the United States. That was just about Christmas time, just before Christmas. Let's see, sometime in January, I think it was about the middle of January, I received my discharge, the war being over, and came back to Hawai'i, arriving

here on the first of February, 1919. So, that wound up my war story.

WN: While all that was taking place, how did you feel? I mean, were you afraid?

RA: Oh, there were times when you're being shot at that you're tense and afraid, yes, sure. You don't know what's coming next, but somehow you go through with whatever the situation is, and I think you rise to an occasion when you have to. You put your feelings aside and do what you think you should do. So, I think that's about the way you might answer how you feel. I remember at one time, I felt pretty lonely after I was taken prisoner, thinking of Hawai'i, how far away it was, and my family, and wondered when I'd see 'em again. (Chuckles)

WN: Did you ever think that you wouldn't see it--home?

RA: I always had an optimistic feeling of getting out eventually. I had not planned to escape myself, but the opportunity opened up. These other chaps had prepared the way and invited two of us latecomers to join them. I think I went over that previously, how we got out.

WN: That's an incredible story. After you came back to Hawai'i, did you go back to Chicago right away?

RA: No, I was here for several months and spent every morning, about three hours every morning, typing this story that I just outlined. And it wound up, you might say, full book length. When in New York, I had a half-brother who was in the publishing business. He was with McClure's magazine. He took me to lunch with the editor of the magazine, Charles Hanson Towne, who was well known in the literary circles. I related my story at lunch to him, whereupon he said, "Well, can you write?"

I said, "Well, I was editor of my school paper. I've written stories, some short stories and articles."

He said, "Well, you go home and you write it just as fully as you like with all the details and send me installments as you get them finished. I'll probably cut a lot of it out, but I'll run the major part of it."

I don't think he cut a single word. I think he published everything I wrote for eight months in McClure's magazine. There was a monthly installment. So that took me about three months, writing, as I say, a couple of hours every morning. Go swim in the afternoon, surfing at Waikiki (chuckles). I was taking it easy and having a vacation. Meantime, I had brought home with me one of my buddies, a Lieutenant Paul Winslow from Chicago, brought him home to visit.

Mrs. Anderson: Isn't there a picture of him?

RA: Yes, I'll show it to him later. He and my sister fell in love with

each other, and they were married the following August. He came and had a visit, went back to his home in Chicago, and then came back in August. And so, they were married, and after the wedding, went back to Chicago to live. But while he was here, he said, "You haven't any definite commitment of a job." And he knew I was interested in engineering and, particularly, I'd heard about what was being done in household refrigeration. And he said, "My father is interested in a company in Chicago who's just started up to manufacture a small machine to be put on an icebox and take the place of the ice. And that's going to be done on a big scale. They're going to have big production, and they need an assistant in their engineering department. They continue to study the improvements, you know, on the machine." And said, "My father said to offer you a job if you're interested."

So, I had no roots here at that time, jobwise. And so, I thought, "Well, this would be an opportunity to learn something." I took the job, went back to Chicago. Meantime, Mrs. Anderson (then Peggy Center) was on her way to go to Europe to study with Dame Nellie Melba, having had a wonderful experience for three years in Australia during the war where she . . .

Mrs. Anderson: There is a picture over there.

RA: . . . she had been the protégée of Melba, and had been learning to sing opera. And Melba wanted her to come on to Europe after the war, she herself having gone on ahead to England. And Peggy was about to do that when we met and fell in love with each other. We didn't know whether to get married then or for her to go ahead with her career and get married at some future time. We finally decided that was the thing to do. So, I went to Chicago, she went to New York with her sister, ready to sail for Europe. But in New York, in the hotel where they were staying, her clergyman, Dean Ault of the Saint Andrew's Cathedral, just happened to come into the dining room when she and her sister were having breakfast. She had had doubts, not knowing which way she wanted to go. So, she had a long talk with the clergyman and asked for his advice. He said, well, he knew me and I was a pretty good guy. He thought that she would make no mistake in coming back to marry me instead of going to Europe. So, she decided that way, and she and her sister came back to Chicago. And we were married there (on November 14, 1919) and lived there for four years while I followed up this job.

Unfortunately, the Isko Company had a little flaw in the chemical they were using for the refrigerant, sulfur dioxide. Sulfur dioxide has to be chemically pure or it will eat into metal. They simply had bought a commercial variety which was not chemically pure, not distilled. After the machines had been in operation two or three months, a little deposit took place over the lubricating holes of the gears, the two little gears of the compressor. The oil was choked off from the gears and the compressor failed to operate. They had shipped out thousands of machines all up and down the East Coast to mostly plumbing establishments who were installing them in people's

homes. I was sent to trace this difficulty, to call on these people that were having trouble. And sure enough, this is what it was. It was too late. So, many of them failed. (Dealers) were shipping them back to the (chuckles) factory faster than they could make them. And they had to fold up, close the company. Too bad, just that one little detail. If they had purified the sulfur dioxide, the machine worked perfectly.

By this time, I was very interested in refrigeration. I found that there was an opening with another company called the McClellan Refrigerating Company. They were making (machines and pipe coils in) made-to-order kits for meat markets. You might say, the forerunner of the present today (super)market. They had a factory in Chicago where they'd manufacture the machines and the cooling coils, and all the equipment (for a particular job). The plan would be sent in from Boston, you see, and we'd make up the complete package to fit that butchershop in Boston, and ship it over there, then they would install it. I was with them a couple of years, became their chief engineer.

We were working on improvements to the system, and I became ill. From the war experience, I'd eaten a lot of coarse stuff. They told me the bread the Germans served had 17 percent sawdust in it. (Chuckles) They were running short of grain and they filled it out with sawdust. Well, that got my insides. . . . I was suffering with ulcers, ulcerated stomach, and had to be treated by a doctor there, Dr. Sippe. After a little bit, he said, "You should take some time off from work." Well, I thought immediately of coming back to Honolulu on a trip. By this time, we had a little fella, two years old. He'd been born two years after we got there. We decided to come back to Honolulu on a trip, and presumably, we'd go back to Chicago. But while I was here, my uncle, Mr. Von Hamm of the Von Hamm-Young Company, which was one of the bigger companies in town at that time, persuaded me to stay and go with the company. And I said, "Well, I will if I can get the franchise for Frigidaire and start a household appliance department." Later, we added the Zenith radio and ABC washing machines, and built a regular household department. I accepted his offer and started to work in 1923.

WN: Where was Von Hamm-Young at the time?

RA: Von Hamm-Young had started in 1889. Two of my uncles, Von Hamm and Young, and they were financed by my grandfather, Alexander Young, father of one of the partners. They had gone into merchandise in various departments. A big wholesale dry goods operation, for one thing, and then a machinery department which led to taking on automobile agencies. They started, I think, as early as 1904 importing automobiles. They had many different makes until they finally established themselves with Buick and Cadillac in one showroom, and in another showroom, Packard and Dodge. Four of the finest lines you could get. Besides that, they had an insurance department, they had the dry goods department, they had automobile tires, the Firestone line, accessories of all kinds. Had a large

garage where the (parking) garage is on Alakea Street now, the municipal garage. That was the Von Hamm-Young garage before the city took it over.

It developed into one of the big companies of the islands. They used to talk about the Big Five sugar people. Well, then you could rate our company next, I should say. We might be number six. So, I grew up in that company through this refrigeration department, and later on, into general management as treasurer, and then the vice-president, and finally, I was president of the company. And then, chairman of the board before I retired. I might say I spent my entire business life with that company from 1923 to 1963, forty years.

Then, well, let's see. During this time, I was always interested in music and, apparently, had a natural instinct for it. My father was a musical person. He was an organist, and he had composed music for the organ. Some of it had been published. My mother was musical. She sang in the church choir. My grandfather Alexander Young had a flair for writing poetry. He wrote quite a few verses about the islands. He came all the way from Scotland to Hawai'i in 1865. From my father, and my mother, and my grandfather, I inherited traits that enabled me to write music, both words and music. So, along about nineteen. . . . Well, I had written one or two tunes when I was in college, 1915, around there. One called "Aloha Land," thinking of the islands at the time. But then, after coming home, my first popular successful song that has remained popular to this day was "Haole Hula," and that was written in 1927. It was produced in a play--first shown in a play where it was danced and sung. And from that time on, it became popular.

WN: What play was this?

RA: "Haole Hula."

WN: I mean, the name of the play was. . . .

RA: The play was Tropic Topics. It was a revue put on by the Junior League group who were raising money, and it was produced by Don Blanding, who was one of our very well-known poets of that day and very good in producing shows. He did a lot of the writing and I supplied the music for two or three shows, one after the other.

WN: Where were the shows performed?

RA: They were performed in the Princess Theater which was on Fort Street, up above Beretania. It's no longer there now. There's nothing there now. But they were very good shows at the time. Then, during my business career, whenever I had an idea, as a hobby I would write music down and compose a song. At first, not expecting to be commercial at all. I didn't know what would happen to the songs. But after that "Haole Hula," which became publicly known, the next one I wrote was "Malihini Mele," which was the idea of a stranger

getting mixed up with Hawaiian words, misusing them, and that was in 1934.

Shortly after that, the "Cock-eyed Mayor of Kaunakakai," written for Warner Baxter, who was a movie star of that day. He came down as a guest of Paul Fagan, who owned a ranch on Moloka'i. Paul said, "I'm going to have a celebration for Warner at Kaunakakai. We'll have a luau, we'll have a parade of broken-down horses, and so forth, with kids on them. Give him a key to the city and make him the mayor." So, he said, "Why don't you write a song about it?" (Chuckles) Well, the sound of Kaunakakai gave me the idea of cock-eyed mayor of Kaunakakai. Because the whole thing sounded screwy, you know, just a joke. I never thought that would be popular, but the beach boys started to sing it. And there was a (Mainland) orchestra in town, they started to play it--Hal Grayson. And the first thing I knew, there was an offer from a New York publisher to publish it. It became quite a big song on the Mainland as well as here. So, then, let me see. Oh, I could go on naming the various songs and something about them, but I guess that might take too much. . . .

WN: By the time "Cock-eyed Mayor of Kaunakakai" was getting popular, do you think it was because it was written by you? I mean, your name was getting well known or something else?

RA: By that time, I wasn't so well known. I'd done "Haole Hula" and "Malihini Mele." No, I think the song itself attracted attention. I mean, it was different from anything else that had been put out. It had a good rhythm and it was kind of screwball words.

WN: Who were some of the entertainers or musicians that performed your songs?

RA: Well, that day, she was called Clara Inter. Clara (as Hilo Hattie) did the "Cock-eyed Mayor" for years and years, right up to the time she died. That was one of her favorites.

WN: Hilo Hattie.

RA: Winona Love was one of the loveliest hula dancers of that time. She featured "Haole Hula," and later on, "Lovely Hula Hands." "Lovely Hula Hands" didn't come until 1940. Before that, there was "What Am I Going to Do for My Red Opu," (chuckles) which Renne Brooks, one of the Hawaiian comedians, used to sing. And little bit later, Alfred Apaka sang my songs. By that time, I had written "I'll Weave a Lei of Stars for You" and "White Ginger Blossoms." And in 1952, I wrote "Mele Kalikimaka," which has been one of the big songs. And there've been a lot of others in between that haven't attracted much attention. I've got a whole book full of them.

WN: Of all your songs, what is your favorite song and what you feel is the most commercially successful song?

RA: "Haole Hula" is my favorite because it tells of the beauty of the islands, my feeling for the islands. Then, that has not been a big song, but it's held on all these years. It's still being performed by Hawaiian musicians. The Hawaiians themselves like it. You might call it hula in English, "Haole Hula." Of course, "Lovely Hula Hands" is the biggest composition commercially. That and "Malihini Mele" have traveled all over the world. I hear from Sweden, Finland, all the European countries. Japan, especially. It's amazing how they've spread, gone all over.

(On May 6, 1985, a month after this interview, at the Na Hokū Hanohano Awards, R. Alex Anderson was awarded the Sydney Grayson award for his contributions to Hawaiian music.)

WN: In 1935, after living for a while in Pacific Heights, you moved over to your wife's family home, the Center home. Can you tell me something about that home and your wife's family?

RA: [RA speaks to wife:] Well, darling, you want to tell about your family? Your father came--he was a Scot, too, wasn't he? He came from Scotland.

Mrs. Anderson: Yes.

RA: And your mother was English?

Mrs. Anderson: Mm hmm [yes]. She married (David Center) the manager of Hana Plantation.

RA: They had a romance aboard a ship from San Francisco to. . . . As I understand it, your mother, who was then single, was coming to visit her friend Mrs. Turner of Punahou School. And Mr. Center was on the same ship, and there was a shipboard romance which led to them getting married. He was a sugar plantation manager.

Mrs. Anderson: Maui.

RA: On Maui.

Mrs. Anderson: Hana.

RA: First in Hana, Maui, where your eldest brother and your eldest sister. . . . And was Jean born there, too? Jean, and Nadine, and David.

Mrs. Anderson: Not I.

RA: All born in Hana. Then, he moved into Spreckelsville, Maui, where you were born. And later on, he was managing Wai'anae Plantation on this island where Mrs. Anderson's younger sister (Helen) was born. There were five children.

WN: What was the home like?

RA: Well, you might call it typically Hawaiian, I guess. It was a story and a half. There were large-sized rooms, an entrance hall that led into a large living room. And from that, you went right on out to the water's edge under a big hau tree, spreading hau tree. There was a nice terrace out in front of the house where we sat and watched the waves. There were one, two, three--three bedrooms. And there was a large attic. I said a story and a half. And I put in a darkroom up there. I was quite interested in photography at that time. I used to develop and print my own pictures. It was a very comfortable home. The bedrooms on one side, the hallway and the big living room down below, and pantry and kitchen back on the right side as you went in. A nice little property right on the water. And of course, that's today where the apartment building is, called the Center Apartments. The house was demolished to build the apartment building. It's right on that same site.

WN: Who were some of the neighbors in the area?

RA: Well, next to us on the left as you face the ocean was the Harrison family. On the right was Miss Cross, and beyond her was the Westervelts and the George Castles. And then, the Harold Castles where the Elks Club is today. Those are the ones that we knew the best. We weren't so well acquainted on this side, just the Harrison place.

WN: What are your thoughts on the changes that have taken place in Waikiki so far?

RA: Well, for a comfortable living, the old days were the best. It's bound to happen though, with such beautiful tourist facilities. The commercial element was bound to grow and with so little space for residences, I guess the apartment complex had to come. And of course, apartments are all over town now, not only along Waikiki. But it's amazing, you go up to a high spot and look down on the city, to see the number of tall buildings nowadays.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay. Well, one more question, I guess, would be, you know, if you look back at your life, what are your feelings toward it and is there anything you would have done differently?

RA: That's a very iffy question.

Mrs. Anderson: Nothing.

RA: I would not have chosen anybody else but my wife. She was the one and only, and still is. I don't want to trade any of our children. They've turned out very well. Three sons and a daughter. And we have a lovely family generally. We have thirteen grandchildren, and they're all turning out pretty well.

Mrs. Anderson: Yes (and two great-grandsons), all beautiful.

RA: They're all, you know, fending for themselves and getting into jobs, getting into activities. Some of them are still in college.

WN: Okay, well, thank you very much, Mr. Anderson.

RA: Okay, you're very welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 13-60-4-85

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert Alexander Anderson (RA)

June 10, 1985

Diamond Head, O'ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. R. Alex Anderson on June 10, 1985 at his home in Diamond Head, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, did you want to continue with your World War I experiences?
[RA wished to add more details to his experiences discussed in interview #13-41-2-85.]

RA: The English corporal Rogers who escaped with us had previously been out and was recaptured. During that time, he had come in contact with a Monsieur Vogel, V-O-G-E-L, and had his name and address in Brussels. Mr. Vogel had said, "If you are able to reach me there, I will see that the Underground takes you through to Holland." So, with this knowledge, we three decided to try and find Mr. Vogel, and we headed for Brussels.

About four or five nights later, we found ourselves in the outskirts of Brussels in a suburb called Forest, F-O-R-E-S-T, where Mr. Vogel lived. We were walking by this time in city streets. And looking up, we saw the sign, "Rue St. Augustine," which was Mr. Vogel's street. A block or two away we found the number of the house. About one o'clock in the morning, we knocked on the door, made quite a loud noise. And finally, a woman came to the window just over the door to see what was going on. I told her we were looking for Mr. Vogel, and she said, "He's not here."

"Well, where is he?"

"He has been captured by the Germans and taken to prison camp."

With that, she closed the window, and we were left standing there. There was nothing to do but move on. A short while later, while still in the outskirts of Brussels, daylight began to overtake us. The first people appeared on the sidewalks, and we realized we must find cover. We were walking alongside of a high brick wall, perhaps eight feet high. And it looked like a park on the interior. So, we climbed the wall, got over into the inner area, and found there were three large three-story houses, separated perhaps fifty yards apart,

in the midst of this very luxurious park-like garden. There was a little summerhouse, and we headed for that because it had started to drizzle and we were cold. Inside the house we found a stove with some wood, and we lit a fire. The smoke attracted the attention of the gardener who came to see who was there. I told him our story. He was very excited, and he went hastily to one of the big houses.

Ten or fifteen minutes later, he returned with two very attractive young ladies, who turned out to be wives of Belgian captains then at the front. They were the occupants of two of these homes. They were sisters. They told us that their parents occupied the third house. Madame Van den Corput, V-A-N D-E-N C-O-R-P-U-T, from the nearest house, after we had told her our story, invited us to come to the house. She put us up in the third-story room where there was a bathroom and some mattresses. We could bathe ourselves and take a rest, go to sleep for a while. She said she would give us dinner that evening. Having told her that we were looking for a German airdrome for the opportunity of possibly stealing a plane, she said that her chauffeur would conduct us through Brussels on the road that led out to such an airdrome. So, after bathing and resting all day, that night we had dinner with her with a beautiful table--white cloth, silver, crystal. These were well-to-do people, and they were not limited in their food. They had sugar and butter. She served a full dinner. Some side of meat.

And then, after dinner, she brought out some of her husband's clothing. We still had parts of our uniforms we were wearing. She had a full two-piece suit, coat and pants, which exactly fitted me. And I put them on. For the other two, Tillinghast and Donaldson, they were taller, and she found overcoats that fairly well fitted them. So, having dined and been clothed, we departed with the chauffeur to cross Brussels and head out to the German airdrome. The chauffeur left us after a while and said, "Just continue on this road."

But it hadn't been a few minutes after that till a Belgian policeman halted us and demanded identification. As usual, I told him who we were. He was very excited and he said, "You must come home with me and sleep in my apartment tonight, and go out tomorrow to see the airdrome and see what the general setup is." So we went to the house not far from there of the Belgian policeman. He shared an apartment with another policeman. They spread out some things on the floor for us to sleep on. We spent the night there with the two Belgian policemen.

Next morning, after getting directions from them, we got onto a tramline, an electric car, which went right out of the city to this German airdrome. When we got there, we saw immediately that these big steel hangars would be impossible for us to enter and get a plane out without being detected because we assumed that it must be well patrolled, and the hangar doors would be too heavy for us to manipulate. So, we gave up then and there the idea of stealing the German plane. We headed back into Brussels. After having some

lunch in an estaminet--oh, first, we went into this little estaminet and told the proprietor who we were. He led us to a corner of the back room and brought us some beer and something to eat.

And then, we said we would like to get haircuts if possible. We were pretty unkempt, I guess you'd call it. And he pointed. He told us just around the corner was a barbershop, Belgian barbershop. We went down. It was down one flight of stairs into a basement. We told the barber immediately who we were. He was very excited. He said, "You get into the chair, I will take care of you. But if a German officer comes in, I put you out of the chair and I take care of the German first." This is when we were wearing the civilian clothes that Mrs. Van den Corput had given us. So we passed as Belgians. This happened while we were in the barbershop. A German officer came in. I got out of the chair. He was taken care of, and I got back in, and he cut my hair. (Chuckles) We were amazed that we were able to get away with this and not be questioned.

So that night or later in the afternoon, armed with more maps, we started toward the north. Having given up the idea of stealing the plane, we said the next thing is to go to Holland, to the northeast corner of Belgium to cross into Holland. That's where everybody said was the easiest. We set out.

I just want to say here that we have kept in close contact with the Van den Corput family ever since they helped us on this escape. My wife and I have visited them in Brussels, visited their son. The older woman had since passed away and her son, Roger, R-O-G-E-R, and his wife Jacqueline entertained us very royally, you might say. Over the years, we've been back three or four times to visit with them. And we've always exchanged Christmas cards and kept in contact. This was a remarkable experience and stayed with us all our lives.

We continued on toward Holland, and as we neared the border, then I can go right into that episode where I knocked on the door and the man said, "Do you speak English?"

WN: Which we have here.

RA: Yeah. Which is already in there. And this would be interpolated, in between. I think it's interesting enough to do that, and what prompted me to do it, really, was a call and a letter, as I told you, from Mrs. Van den Corput, Jacqueline. She speaks almost perfect English with a little French thrown in. I'd sent a copy of Honolulu magazine, I don't know whether you saw that, with an interview of Mrs. Anderson and myself.

WN: No. When was this?

RA: That was last November issue.

WN: Oh, I didn't see that.

RA: It's quite an interesting article. I'll show you one. And in that, I talked about having been in Brussels, I think, during the escape, but I didn't mention the family at all. I think they felt a little bit hurt that I hadn't given credit for what they had done. So, that's what I'm trying to do here. (Chuckles) Make up for it.

WN: Were you surprised of the support and cooperation you got from the people along the way?

RA: Yes, I guess we were. I mean, we didn't expect it to begin with, but they were immediately anxious to help us as soon as we. . . . Anybody we met. In other words, they were out to defeat the Germans--Germans all through Belgium occupying the country. But some of them were a little bit cautious. They didn't want the Germans to find out they were helping escaped prisoners. They would go hard with them if that was discovered. But they were all willing to feed us and put us up in one way or another to sleep.

Another family that went out of its way to help us was Gustav Hus, H-U-S. Well, he's the one, who when we knocked at the door, said, "Do you speak English?" and we went on. He was the one who put us in contact with the Underground man who got us through the border. And it was with him and his brother that we lived for eight or nine days, waiting for the guide. I think that's in the script there. So, those two families stand out in my mind immediately.

WN: Besides that one incident in the barbershop, were there others times when you came into direct contact with German soldiers?

RA: We avoided a contact one night. We were cautious when we came to railroad crossings and bridge crossings because we knew some of them were guarded. There'd be sentry on 'em. This one night about midnight, we were approaching through the small town down the main street. Of course, everything is black. Nobody out on the streets at all, just the three of us going along. And all at once, we saw a flashlight fifty yards or so ahead of us. Well, we backed against the wall of the building, and made ourselves inconspicuous as possible. This flashlight started coming towards us. But before he reached us, he crossed the street and a door opened. In the light from inside, we saw it was a German--sentry, no doubt. We figured that, just by luck, he was taking relief--he was going in to get some coffee or whatever. And in that time, we crossed the bridge and got clear on the other side. If he had not exposed himself, we would have run straight into him and probably been taken.

Another close one was the first night out after we had swum the canal. We were starting along a railroad track. We came to a place where the track turned and there was a spur going to the right. It was leading to a big factory where the lights were on full. It was apparently a munitions factory. They were manufacturing war materials, no doubt. We had just gone past this Y in the tracks. We went in the direction away from the factory instead of to the factory. As we had gone just a little way, a German sentry yelled, "Halt!" H-A-L-T,

he called "Halt." I, (chuckles) just on the spur of the moment I know it came out, I said, "Was ist?" In other words, "What's the matter? What is it?" But we didn't stop walking. We kept on walking. It was in the direction away from him. So, in as much as we were not bothering him, you might say, he let us go without any further (chuckles) stopping. Some other sentry might have stopped us, and searched us, and found us right then and there. That was the first night out. We were only half a mile away from our prison. (Laughs) Those were two outstanding things.

Then right on the borderline, I think I explained how we waited in the bushes and saw the German sentry go back and forth along the wire fence, electrified fence, until some confederate of our guide, we figured, a hundred yards or so to our left, took a shot at the sentry. The sentry came running back. He was wounded apparently, passed, crossed where we were. And as soon as he'd gone by, my guide gave the signal for us to dash out and cut the wires, and duck under, and head for the woods on the other side. After we kept running for a while, and then we slowed down, he said, "Now you're in Holland. You're safe." So, I think, that, I covered already.

WN: No, I don't think you did. Not that part.

RA: Not in such detail.

WN: No, not cutting the . . .

RA: I guess I just made a general statement that we got through. But that's how we got through the actual borderline between Belgium and Holland. Our friends who had escaped with us, Rogers and Mandell, and had gone off by themselves--five of us originally escaped, and we divided two and three. We learned later that they had gotten to the border and been captured. They didn't have the good fortune we had to have a guide who was making a business of going through and knew how to do it.

WN: What was the name of you--Rogers. . . .

RA: Rogers, R-O-G-E-R-S, was a British corporal. I think I only remember last names. Mandell, M-A-N-D-E-L-L. Oh, it was Oscar, seems to me. Oscar Mandell. I don't remember Rogers' first name. Then, the three of us were Tillinghast (chuckles)--reason I don't remember his name, we all called him "Tilli." "Tilli"--Tillinghast. What was his first name?

WN: T-I-L-L-I-N-G . . .

RA: I-N-G-H-A-S-T. Mind you, over the years, we visited him back in Connecticut, his home in Connecticut. And once, he and his wife came to Hawai'i. With Donaldson, however, Donaldson was not married. John Donaldson was he. John continued to fly after the war was over. Oh, I think it was the first year after the war, he was killed in a flying accident. John Donaldson.

WN: And of these, yourself, and Tillinghast, and Donaldson were Americans?

RA: Yes. So was Mandell, an American. Rogers was British.

WN: Did you have any plans as to what would you do if you got captured? Did you have any line, you know, what you were going to tell them or any kind of fake ID or anything like that?

RA: No, I don't think we (chuckles) had thought that far. We have to depend on our wits at the (chuckles) time. When I was shot down and captured, I remember a little incident. We were issued by the British small pocket compasses. We were told, "Now, in case you're captured, you might need this compass to guide you in an escape." Well, I kept that compass in one of the pockets of my pants and there was a handkerchief in there with it. When I first got out of the plane, they searched me--the Germans who'd just come around. And I turned out my pockets. But in the handkerchief which was in my hand I had this little compass. It was only about as big as a quarter. So, I concealed it and he was satisfied. I put the pockets back in and kept the compass. And we used that compass on our escape, especially the first few nights, to be guided what direction we wanted to go. After we got maps and we got instructions, we didn't need it so much. But we started out being very cautious. We avoided the roads at first. We crossed through turnip patches and vegetable gardens. And we used the compass to hold to a certain direction. Well, that was very slow going because walking over plowed ground was not easy and you have interruptions with the material that was planted there.

So, gradually, we got bolder and we walked along the roads. We'd generally go close to the side of the road and in the shadows wherever we could. At first we avoided villages. We went around them. But we got bolder (chuckles) on that and went down through the main street. These little villages, that's all it was, a clump of houses on each side of a main road. That's how we almost got captured, with the incident I just related, the flashlight coming toward us. We just had good breaks everywhere. That's why I called my story "Shot with Luck." (Chuckles)

WN: "Shot with Luck"?

RA: Yeah. We just had luck with us all the way. Could have been captured a number of times.

WN: That Dawn Patrol, that motion picture that was based on your experience, is it pretty accurate or are you happy with that . . .

RA: Well, it was dramatized. Of course, what happened in the picture never did happen. It's what we tried to do. We tried to steal a German plane to fly back. Now, in the movie, that's what happened, you see. He was successful. It's easy to do it in the movie. (Chuckles)

WN: So, up until the time they stole the plane, does it follow your experiences pretty good or did they deviate from that also?

RA: No, they only took the title from me, the Dawn Patrol. I told this reporter or this writer our general experiences and how we had wanted to steal a German plane. We had gone as far to the airdrome and turned back. And so, she fastens on that and makes it happen, you see. (Chuckles) Richard Barthelmess, who was the hero of that picture, gets away with it. (Laughs) What we couldn't do. It was very easy in the movie.

WN: So, the McClure's Magazine account is accurate?

RA: Yes. Seven issues in 1919, starting with February or March, 1919.

WN: Gee, that's amazing. Okay, I guess that's it.

RA: I don't know. The meeting of the Van den Corputs is what I wanted to integrate into what I had already done. I don't know how much of the other material. . . . Maybe you can find spots to fit that in. Because it's interesting, actually--the barbershop in Brussels and. . . .

END OF INTERVIEW

WAIKĪKĪ, 1900 - 1985: ORAL HISTORIES

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